

Sūrah As-Saff

(The Row)

This Sūrah is Madanī, and it has 14 verses and 2 sections

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 9

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ ۗ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيْمُ ﴿١﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لِمَ تَقُوْلُوْنَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُوْنَ ﴿٢﴾ كَبِيْرًا مَّقْتًا عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَنْ تَقُوْلُوْا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُوْنَ ﴿٣﴾ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِيْنَ يُقَاتِلُوْنَ فِيْ سَبِيْلِهِ صَفًا كَانْتُمْ بُنِيَّانَ مَرْضُوْصٍ ﴿٤﴾ وَاِذْ قَالَ مُوْسٰى لِقَوْمِهٖ يَقُوْمِ لِمَ تُوْذُوْنِيْ وَقَدْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ اِنِّيْ رَسُوْلُ اللّٰهِ اِلَيْكُمْ ۗ فَلَمَّا زَاغُوْا زَاغَ اللّٰهُ قُلُوْبَهُمْ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفٰسِقِيْنَ ﴿٥﴾ وَاِذْ قَالَ عِيْسٰى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ بِنِيْٓ اِسْرٰٓئِيْلَ اِنِّيْ رَسُوْلُ اللّٰهِ اِلَيْكُمْ مُّصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرٰتِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُوْلٍ يَّاتِيْ مِنْۢ بَعْدِي اِسْمُهٗ اَحْمَدُ ۗ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنٰتِ قَالُوْا هٰذَا سِحْرٌ مُّبِيْنٌ ﴿٦﴾ وَمَنْ اَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرٰى عَلٰى اللّٰهِ الْكٰذِبَ وَهُوَ يُدْعٰى اِلَى الْاِسْلَامِ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظّٰلِمِيْنَ ﴿٧﴾ يٰرَيْدُوْنَ لِيُطْفِئُوْا نُوْرَ اللّٰهِ بِاَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللّٰهُ مُتِمُّ نُوْرِهٖ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكٰفِرُوْنَ ﴿٨﴾ هُوَ الَّذِيْ اَرْسَلَ رَسُوْلَهٗ بِالْهُدٰى وَدِيْنِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهٗ عَلٰى الَّذِيْنَ كُفِرُوْا وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُوْنَ ﴿٩﴾

Allah's purity has been proclaimed by all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, and He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. [1] O those who believe, why do you say what you do not do? [2] It is severely hateful in Allah's sight that you say what you do not do. [3] Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in firm rows, as if they were a solid edifice. [4] And (remember) when Mūsā said to his people, "O my people, why do you hurt me, while you know that I am a messenger of Allah towards you." So, when they adopted crookedness, Allah let their hearts become crooked. And Allah does not guide the sinful people. [5] And (remember) when ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, said, "O children of Israʿīl, I am a messenger of Allah towards you, confirming the Taurah that is (sent down) before me, and giving you the good news of a messenger who will come after me, whose name is Aḥmad." But when he came to them with manifest signs, they said, "This is a clear magic." [6] And who is more unjust than the one who forges a lie against Allah, while he is invited to Islam? And Allah does not guide the unjust people. [7] They wish to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah is to perfect His light, even though the disbelievers dislike (it). [8] He is the One who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He makes it prevail over all religions, even though the *mushriks* (those who ascribe partners to Allah) dislike (it). [9]

Commentary

Background of the revelation

Tirmidhī has recorded, on the authority of Sayyidnā ʿAbdullāh Ibn Salām ﷺ, that a group of Companions discussed among themselves that if we come to know which is the dearest of actions in the sight of Allah, we shall act upon it. Ḥākim reported this Tradition and graded its chain as '*ṣaḥīḥ*'. Baghawī in his citation added the following words: "If we come to know which is the dearest of actions in the sight of Allah, we shall dedicate our lives and wealth to it." [Maḥzarī].

Ibn Kathīr, with reference to Musnad of Aḥmad, reports that some of the Companions gathered and wanted someone to go to Allah's Messenger ﷺ and ask him about the action that is dearest to Allah, but no one dared to do so. Whilst this discussion was going on, the Holy Messenger ﷺ sent a man to call each one of them by name. When they all arrived, the Holy

Prophet ﷺ recited the entire Sūrah Aṣ-Ṣaff which had been revealed just then. This Sūrah shows that the 'dearest action' they were looking for was 'jihād in the cause of Allah' and their statement that 'if we come to know about it, we shall dedicate our lives in acting upon it' was a sort of claim of having ability to do it. At this, they are admonished that it is not proper for any believer to make such a claim, because no one can for sure know whether he will be able to implement his intentions when the time arrives. It is not in his power that all the causes of action are made effective and all impediments are removed. Nor are the abilities and strengths of his hands or arms or limbs or organs altogether in his power. Nor is his determination or intention completely in his control. Therefore, even the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been instructed in the Qur'an, thus:

وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ

"And never say about anything, 'I am going to do this tomorrow, unless [you say - 'if] Allah wills.) [18: 23-24]

Although the intention of the blessed Companions was not to make a boastful claim, it did seem apparently as a claim, which Allah dislikes. If a person makes a commitment to do something in the future, he needs to surrender it to the Divine will and affirm it by saying 'If Allah wills'. The following verses are revealed to admonish the believers.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢﴾ كَبِيرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(O those who believe, why do you say what you do not do? It is severely hateful in Allah's sight that you say what you do not do...61:2-3)

Apparently, the phrase 'what you do not do' implies that one should not claim to do something he does not intend to do. From this it may be deduced that it is prohibited to make a commitment to do a work while a person does not have the genuine intention to really do it, because this would be ostentation and a false commitment. Obviously, the blessed Companions, in the story of the background of revelation, were not making such promises without having intention to fulfill them. Instead, their intention was genuine. From this we learn that the verse includes a situation where a person commits to do something with true intention to do it, but relies solely on his own strength, it is not in keeping with his

station of 'abdiyyah or 'servitude'. First of all, there is no need to make such a claim. If the occasion does arise to do something, he may go ahead and do it. If, for some reason or the other, a person has to make a promise or claim, he may affirm it by saying 'If Allah wills'. In this way, it would not be a boastful claim.

Ruling

It follows from the above discussion that if a person claims that he will do something in future but has no intention to do it, it is a major sin (*kabīrah*) and a cause of incurring Allah's wrath. The sentence: كَبْرَمَفْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ "It is severely hateful in Allah's sight that you say what you do not do...[61:3]" applies to this situation. However, in a situation where one makes a claim to do something in future with real intention to do it, it is *makrūh* [reprehensible] and forbidden only if he makes the claim relying on his own strength and ability.

Difference between a Claim (*Da'wā*) and Preaching (*Da'wah*)

It is learnt from the foregoing discussion that these verses are related to false claims (*Da'wā*) to do something in future without intention to do it, which incurs Divine displeasure and indignation. This verse is not related to a situation where a preacher invites others to do something, while he himself does not do it. The rules of this situation are mentioned in other verses and Aḥadīth. For example: أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ (Do you bid others to righteousness while you ignore your own selves) [2:44] This verse puts to shame such preachers who do not practice what they preach. The import of this verse is that when they are preaching to others, they should preach to themselves with greater force, and if they are calling other people to do good deeds, they too should practice them.

All this does not imply that if a person has been lax in the performance of good deeds, he should abandon preaching to others. Or if he has been indulging in any kind of sin, he should not forbid others from indulging in such sins. It needs to be borne in mind that the performance of a righteous deed is one form of virtue, and urging others to perform this righteous deed is another form of virtue in its own right. Obviously, if one has abandoned one form of virtue, it does not necessarily follow that he should abandon the other form as well. It is possible that through the blessing of the preachment, the preacher might develop the ability to perform the righteous deed. This has been experienced widely and on a

large scale. However, if the deed belongs to the category of *wājib* or *sunnah mu'akkadah*, it is obligatory, in the light of the verses, to continuously show remorse and regret on one's not practicing it. And if the action belongs to the category of *mustaḥabbāt*, it is *mustaḥab* [rewardable] to show remorse and regret.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ صَفًّا كَانَهُمْ بِنْيَانٌ مَّرْصُورٌ (Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in firm rows, as if they were a solid edifice...61:4) The main subject of this Sūrah for which it was revealed is to mention the dearest action in the sight of Allah. This verse states that it is *jihād* in Allah's way, and that the best row of battle in the sight of Allah is the one firmly established against Allah's enemies to make Allah's word prevail, and which, on account of the valor and unshaken determination of Mujāhidīn, looks like a strong structure cemented with molten lead.

This is followed by a description of the Jihāds which Prophets Mūsā and 'Īsā عليهم السلام fought in Allah's Cause, and how they suffered at the hands of the enemies. After this description, the Muslims are directed to undertake *jihād*. The stories of Prophets Mūsā and 'Īsā عليهم السلام have many academic and practical lessons and guidance to offer. For instance, it is described in the story of 'Īsā عليه السلام that when he invited the Children of Israel to accept his prophet-hood and obey him, he mentioned two things in particular. First, he said that he was not a unique Prophet who came with unique teachings. In fact, his teachings were the same as those of the previous prophets. They are mentioned in the earlier celestial scriptures, and the same teachings will be imparted later by the Final Messenger of Allah ﷺ. From among the earlier Scriptures, Torah is specially mentioned in this context, probably because that was the latest Scripture that was revealed to the Children of Israel. Otherwise belief in the Prophets embraces all the previous Scriptures of Allah. This also points out that the Shari'ah of 'Īsā عليه السلام was, though an independent Shari'ah, its most rules conformed to the sacred laws of Mūsā عليه السلام and the Torah. Only a few laws had been changed. This theme covered the subject of belief in the previous Prophets and their Books.

The second thing 'Īsā عليه السلام mentioned in particular was the good news of the advent of the Final Messenger ﷺ. This too points out that his teachings will also be the same as those of the previous Prophets, and therefore it is the demand of reason and honesty to believe in him.

Prophet 'Īsā عليه السلام foretold the Children of Israel that a Final Messenger ﷺ will come after him by the name of Aḥmad. When he appears, it would be obligatory for them to embrace faith in him and obey him *مُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ* (...and giving you the good news of a messenger who will come after me, whose name is Aḥmad."...6) The name of the Final Messenger is given here as Aḥmad. The name of the Final Messenger ﷺ was Muḥammad and Aḥmad. He had some other names as well. However, the name given in Injīl is Aḥmad rather than Muḥammad, perhaps because Muḥammad was a common name in Arabia since time immemorial. There was a possibility that the people might take the reference to some other person, rather than the Final Messenger of Allah. The name Aḥmad, on the other hand, was an uncommon name in Arabia, and was exclusive to the Final Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Prophecy of The Final Messenger of Allah in Injīl

It is a known fact that the previously revealed Divine scriptures have been changed and distorted. The Jews and the Christians themselves had to admit that Torah and Injīl have been subjected to changes and distortion. As a matter of fact, the distortions made in these scriptures are so drastic that it is hardly possible to make out the original texts of the scriptures. Based on the distorted version of Injīl, the Christians today challenge the correctness of the Qur'ānic version of the prophecy, asserting that no prophecy in the name of Aḥmad is found in the Injīl. An elaborate response to Christian challenge has been prepared by Maulana Raḥmatullah Kairānwī رحمه الله تعالى. The name of his book is *Izhār-ul-Ḥaqq*. He has thoroughly analyzed Christianity and changes made in the Bible. He concludes that despite drastic changes in the present Biblical version the prophecy about the Prophet Aḥmad ﷺ is still available.

This book was originally written in Arabic, later its translations appeared in Turkish and English. Christian missionaries attempted their utmost to destroy it. Its Urdu translation was not available until recently. A little while back, Maulana Akbar 'Alī, a lecturer at Dārul Uloom Karachi, translated it into Urdu, with in-depth research into current versions of the Bible by Maulana Muḥammad Taqī, lecturer at Darul Uloom, and published in three volumes. Volume [3] from pages 182 to 362 elaborates on the prophecies pertaining to the Holy Prophet ﷺ with

reference to the currently published Bibles, and rebuts their doubts and allays their suspicions.

Verse 10 - 14

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ تِجَارَةٍ تُنَجِّيْكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ أَلِيمٍ ﴿١٠﴾ تُوْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١﴾ يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَيُدْخِلْكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ وَمَسْكِنَٰتٍ طَيِّبَةٍ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾ وَأُخْرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَا ۗ نَصْرٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ ۗ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا أَنْصَارَ اللَّهِ كَمَا قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِّلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ ۗ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ فَاْمَنْتَ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرَت طَّائِفَةٌ ۗ فَأَيَّدْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمْ فَأَصْبَحُوا ظَاهِرِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

O those who believe, shall I tell you about a trade that saves you from a painful punishment? [10] (It is that) you believe in Allah and His Messenger, and carry out *jihad* in His way with your riches and your lives. That is much better for you, if you but know. [11] (If you do this,) He will forgive for you your sins, and will admit you to gardens beneath which rivers flow, and to pleasant dwellings in gardens of eternity. That is the great achievement. [12] And (He will give you) another thing that you love: Help from Allah, and a victory, near at hand. [13] O those who believe, be supporters of (the religion of) Allah, just as 'Īsā, son of Maryam, said to the Disciples, "Who are my supporters towards Allah?" The Disciples said, "We are the supporters of (the religion of) Allah." So a group from the children of Isrā'īl believed, and another group disbelieved. Then We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became victorious. [14]

Commentary

تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ (...you believe in Allah and His Messenger, and carry out *jihād* in His way with your riches and your lives....61:11) This verse refers to 'faith and *jihād* (struggle) in Allah's way with one's wealth and life' as a trade, because when man invests wealth in trade and works hard, he gains profit. Likewise, when man believes in Allah and invests his life and wealth in His cause, he incurs Allah's pleasure and attains the eternal blessings of the Hereafter, which is mentioned in the forthcoming verse that whoever carries out this trade, Allah will forgive his sins and provide him with dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity with all sorts of luxuries and comforts, as is mentioned by the Holy Prophet ﷺ in explanation of 'pleasant dwellings'. Alongside the blessings of the Hereafter, the next verse promises some blessings of this world too:

وَأُخْرَى تُحِبُّونَهَا ط نَصْرٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ (And [He will give you] another thing that you love: Help from Allah, and a victory, near at hand ...61:13) This verse adds that the blessings of this trade are not restricted to the Hereafter. There is one blessing that will be granted right here in this world, which is the Divine help and an imminent victory, that is, conquests of enemy territories. If the word *qarīb* (near) is taken as the opposite of Hereafter, it would include all later Islamic conquests of Arab and non-Arab territories. And if the word *qarīb* (near) is taken in its normal sense, it would, in the first instance, apply to the conquest of Khaibar, and in the second instance it would apply to the Conquest of Makkah. This 'near victory' is referred to as "تُحِبُّونَهَا" "that you love". It implies that this worldly blessing is dear to man, because he is by nature haste-prone as the Qur'an says "وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا" "...and man is prone to haste. [17:11] This, however, does not imply that the blessings of the Hereafter are not dear to him. It simply means that the love of seeking the blessings of the Hereafter is quite obvious, but he naturally would love to have the blessings of this world as well. They too will be granted to him.

كَمَا قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ (...just as 'Īsā, son of Maryam, said to the Disciples, "Who are my supporters towards Allah?" ...[61:14]) The word حَوَارِيَّينَ *hawāriyyīn* is the plural of *hawāriyy* which connotes a 'sincere friend who is free from any kind of adulteration' [Rūḥ-ul-Ma'ānī,

referring to Azharī]. This is the reason why people who believed in Prophet Jesus ﷺ are called *hawāriyy*. They were twelve in number, as is already discussed in Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān. This verse refers to an incident of Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ and urges the Muslims to gird up their loins to unselfishly help and support the religion of Allah, as when Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ was hurt by the enemies, he asked his disciples *مَنْ أَنْصَرِحْ إِلَى اللَّهِ* "Who are my supporters towards Allah?" ...[14] In other words, 'who will help and support me in propagating the religion of Allah?' Twelve people volunteered and pledged to his loyalty and helped him in preaching the religion. Following this example, the Muslims ought to help and support Allah's religion. The blessed Companions of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ followed this example to the fullest extent, and acted upon this command to the highest degree, so much so that the example of the Holy Prophets' Companions stands unparalleled in the history of other ummahs. They helped the Holy Prophet ﷺ and, in the process, incurred the wrath and enmity of Arab and non-Arab communities for the sake of Allah's religion. They bore their tortures and persecution. They dedicated their lives, wealth and children to the cause. Eventually, Allah granted them help and victory. He granted them triumph and mastery of the world, and the territories of the enemies fell into their hands.

Three Groups of Christians

فَأَمْنَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرْتُ طَائِفَةٌ ۚ فَأَيَّدْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمْ
فَأَصْبَحُوا ظَاهِرِينَ

(So, a group from the children of Isra'il believed, and another group disbelieved. Then We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became victorious...61:14)

Baghawi interprets this verse in the light of a narration of Sayyidna 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās ؓ that when Prophet 'Īsā ﷺ was raised to the heaven, his followers disagreed and became three groups. A group claimed that He was Himself God who went back to the heaven. The second group claimed that He Himself was not God, but God's son. God lifted him up and salvaged him from the enemies and granted him superiority. The third group proclaimed the truth and said that he was neither god nor the son of god, but he was Allah's servant and His Messenger. Allah took him away to the heaven to protect him from the enemies, and to raise his status. These people were the true believers.

Different sectors of the general public attached themselves to each one of these groups. The groups clashed with one another. The two of the non-believing groups overpowered the third group, which was a group of true believers. Eventually, Allah raised the Final Messenger of Allah ﷺ who supported the group of the true believers. This group thus dominated the others because of their correct belief and its solid proofs confirmed by the Qur'an. [Maẓharī].

In this interpretation, the phrase الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا "those who believed [14]" would refer to the believers of the Ummah of the Prophet 'Īsā عليه السلام who would triumph against the unbelievers with the help and support of the Final Messenger ﷺ. [Maẓharī]. Some scholars hold that when Prophet 'Īsā عليه السلام was raised to the heaven, his followers were divided into two groups. One of them believed that he was God or God's son and thus they became polytheists. The other group believed that he was the servant of Allah and His Messenger, and thus they stuck to the right religion. Then there was a war between the believers and the unbelievers. Allah granted victory to the believing faction of Prophet 'Īsā عليه السلام against the unbelieving faction. But it is popularly understood that in the religion of Prophet 'Īsā عليه السلام the institution of *jihād* did not exist. Therefore, it is inconceivable that believers would have waged a war. [Rūḥ-ul-Ma'ānī]. However, it is possible that the unbelieving Christians might have started the war and the believing Christians were forced to defend themselves. This will not fall under the category of war.

Alḥamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Aṣ-Ṣaff
Ends here